How to Communicate with the Media as an NICHD Fellow

By Hyo Won Ahn, PhD

You might occasionally see NIH leadership in the news—like Anthony Fauci, MD, former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, speaking with CNN during the COVID-19 pandemic or new NIH Director Monica Bertagnolli, MD, in an interview with The New York Times. Their media appearances help the public understand NIH’s mission and build more trust in what NIH does.

Media 101: Defining the Media Landscape, a training course from the NICHD Office of Communications (OC), was offered to NICHD fellows on January 18, 2024, to provide more information about the process of reporting science in the media.

Paul Williams, Director of Communications at NICHD, kicked-off the course with his talk, “Why speak to the press?” As we all experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, science can be easily misunderstood. It is therefore crucial that NICHD communicates clearly and confidently about the public health significance of NICHD research, and speaking with the media helps NICHD gain access to large audiences.

At the institute level, the OC issues news releases and other articles that highlight NICHD research findings, and they publish stories about individual NICHD researchers. NICHD also uses various social media platforms and newsletters to reach wider and more diverse audiences.

But what is the procedure if a reporter requests an interview with someone at the NICHD? As a first step, always contact NICHD’s OC (nichdpress@mail.nih.gov or 301-496-5133) before proceeding. If you are interested in doing the interview, OC will help coordinate. If you aren’t interested and/or the request falls outside your area of expertise, OC can decline on your behalf and refer the reporter elsewhere.

If you accept the interview request, you will want to understand who reporters are and what they want to get out of the interview. For this, Elizabeth McMahan, MS, (continued on page 3)
Letter from the Editor

Have you ever tried to explain the importance of your research to a non-specialist? It’s not an easy task. But next to the research itself, it’s one of the most important skills you can learn as a scientist.

In serving as a science communicator for the past decade or so, I’ve made a fun observation about my interviews with highly specialized researchers. Often, some of the best quotes about their findings happen when the interview is over—after we’ve finished the “shop talk” and start chatting about life and shared interests.

Inevitably, after the formal part of the interview, researchers re-initiate talking about their work but in relation to a fun anecdote or something surprising about their research. They begin storytelling, and that’s when the meaningful communication happens. It’s in those moments that their work becomes captivating, relatable—and clearly impactful.

During a recent workshop on how to communicate with the media as a fellow, the NICHD Office of Communications shared tips about explaining your science to the media. Many of their tips align with storytelling: use simple words and active voice, relate concepts to familiar ideas, and have a few key ideas to get across. Check out Dr. Hyo Won Ahn’s recap (on page 1) for more guidance on talking about your work and what to do if a reporter contacts you!

But you don’t need to wait until your work makes the news to talk about your research with others. You have many opportunities to share your ideas and findings with a broad audience without leaving the NIH campus. We’ve listed several programs that are exclusive to NIH fellows on page 4. Do take advantage!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

This newsletter is for NICHD fellows and by NICHD fellows. We want to hear from you! Please send your questions, comments, and ideas to our editor at shana.spindler@nih.gov.
How to Communicate with the Media as an NICHD Fellow
(continued from page 1)

a writer and editor in the OC, led a session titled, “About reporters and newsrooms.” She introduced daily news cycles, deadlines, and the types of reporters you might meet.

In terms of scientific knowledge, reporters are often representative of the general public, and usually hold non-STEM degrees. A reporter would want fast responses to their inquiries, meaningful quotes, and information for the takeaway message. Typically, a reporter will not submit questions in advance and prefers responses that avoid scientific terms, jargon, and passive voice.

To help you prepare to explain your science to reporters, Robert Bock, Press Officer in the NICHD OC, presented, “Explaining science to reporters,” during which he shared essential points to remember. He suggested that for an interview, you should:

» Omit details and focus on the “big picture”
» Use simple words and active voice
» Replace commonly used medical terms with those that are easier to understand, such as saying “long-term” in place of “chronic”
» Relate scientific concepts to familiar ideas with metaphors and analogies
» Prepare 3 or 4 key messages or talking points that you want to get across

As a wrap-up exercise, participants of Media 101 wrote a press release headline using the abstract of a recent publication from an NICHD intramural lab. After the exercise, the actual headline was revealed and compared to what participants suggested. Summarizing a research study in one sentence, using only general terms, was more challenging than it sounds!

This was an informative course that is ideal for those interested in learning why and how NICHD communicates with the media, the role of the OC in this process, the media environment, and how to make your story easy to understand for general audiences.
Want to Practice Talking About Your Research?

Lab notebooks can't communicate your research findings to the world—but you can. As an NICHD trainee, you have access to an abundance of opportunities to practice sharing your project ideas, results, and conclusions with your NIH colleagues. For your convenience, we've listed many of those opportunities below!

**NICHD Intramural Annual Scientific Retreat**
Every year, the NICHD intramural program organizes an annual retreat for intramural researchers—PIs and lab members—to celebrate achievements and spark new collaborations. In recent years, many of the Scientific Retreat presenters have been NICHD fellows!

**NICHD Annual Meeting for Postdoctoral, Clinical and Visiting Fellows, Graduate Students and Postbacs**
The main feature of the annual fellows' retreat is YOU! There are several formats to share your research findings and ideas—such as poster sessions, feature oral presentations, and short five-minute talks.

**SciBites**
Want to talk about your research in a professionally produced short video? Check out SciBites, a series of easily digestible, “bite-size” videos about NIH Intramural Research Program (IRP) research. For example, former NICHD graduate student Dr. Jeremie Oliver Piña (D’Souza lab) made this short video about his research on “cultivating clues to combat cleft palates.”

**Three-minute-Talk (TmT) Competition**
The TmT competition is an annual science communication program at the NIH. The competition fosters an environment for fellows to convey their research in a concise way to a broad scientific audience. This is a terrific opportunity for you to learn (and practice!) how to explain your research in a way that’s meaningful to scientists outside your specialized field—a skill that’s become increasingly important.

(continued on page 5)
Want to Practice Talking About Your Research?
*(continued from page 4)*

**Summer Poster Day**
Summer Poster Day is a chance for summer interns at NIH to present their research to a broad scientific audience. This exciting day offers an excellent opportunity for networking with colleagues and building critical science communication skills.

**Postbac Poster Day**
Postbac Poster Day is an opportunity for early-career trainees to share their NIH research projects and at the same time develop communication and networking skills. All NICHD postbacs are encouraged to present at this annual event!

**Graduate Student Research Symposium**
All graduate students performing their doctoral dissertation research at NIH are eligible and encouraged to participate in this annual event that showcases graduate student research through talks, posters, and networking.

**NIH Research Festival**
The Research Festival is an annual showcase of NIH intramural research. This event brings together researchers from across all NIH institutes for a multi-day opportunity to share research findings and form new collaborations. All members of the NIH Intramural Research Program are encouraged to participate.
The Rep Report
By Hyo Won Ahn, PhD

As the current NICHD Basic Sciences Institutes and Centers (IC) Representative, I represent NICHD postdoctoral fellows at the NIH Fellows Committee (FelCom) meeting every month and share the latest news with you here. Do you have a concern or question that you want brought up at the next meeting? Contact me, Hyo Won Ahn, at hyowon.ahn@nih.gov.

The Office of Intramural Training and Education welcomes Laura Marler, PhD, as the new director of Office of Postdoc Services!

The FARE2025 Travel Award Competition is now open! Submit an abstract for a chance to win a $1,500 travel award to present your exciting and novel research at a scientific meeting during October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025. Check out this month’s announcements and events for more information about the FARE competition and how to submit your abstract online.

The FelCom Outreach liaison is looking for stories from fellows. The training page on The Catalyst is going to address mentorship in the March/April issue and is currently seeking stories about mentor-mentee relationships at NIH that can be shared in the article. Whether your mentor is a supervisor, postdoc, or staff scientist, the stories will showcase the diverse experiences within the NIH community. Share your stories, both the triumphs and challenges, and let your voice be heard. If you’re interested in sharing your story, reach out to Stacy Liang (shen-huan.liang@nih.gov).

The Service and Outreach Subcommittee will host a Science for Kids Day event on Saturday, March 23, and is asking for volunteers at this time. This outreach event is a collaboration with the Washington Center for International Education and aims to spark curiosity, foster creativity, and lay the foundation for science in kids in 4th and 5th grade of elementary school. If you are interested or need more information, please reach out to Alex Vendola (alex.vendola@nih.gov) or Rachel Keith (rachel.keith@nih.gov).

The Women Scientist Fellows Committee announced the following:
» Save the date for Women Scholar Symposium: Monday, April 29, 2-4 p.m. (virtual).
» Subscribe to our mailing list at WOMEN-FELLOWS@LIST.NIH.GOV.

Did you know that there are several ways to stay informed on postdoc activities and events?
» Fellows listserv is the main source of FelCom event advertisements, so don’t forget to sign up.
» Visiting fellows can also sign up for the Visiting Fellows listserv.
March Announcements

CONGRATS TO NICHD GRADUATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (GPP) GRADUATES

Every year, GPP graduates are recognized at the annual NIH-wide Graduate Student Research Symposium. At this year’s Graduate Ceremony event on February 15, 2024, NICHD graduate students Zoe Elizabeth Piccus, Jeremie Oliver Piña, and Daniela Marta Roth received certificates for the successful completion of their dissertation research.

Dr. Zoe Elizabeth Piccus, a graduate of Brown University, studied under the mentorship of Claire Le Pichon, PhD, Unit on the Development of Neurodegeneration, NICHD.
» Thesis title: “Mouse Models of Motor Neuron Disease Stemming from Unrestrained Sphingolipid Synthesis”

Dr. Jeremie Oliver Piña, a graduate of University of Utah, studied under the mentorship of Rena D’Souza, DDS, MS, PhD, Section on Molecules and Therapies for Craniofacial and Dental Disorders, NICHD, and David W. Grainger, PhD, Biomedical Engineering, University of Utah.
» Thesis title: “Multi-omic Spatiotemporal Resolution of WNT-Mediated Signaling during Normal and Abnormal Palate Formation”

Dr. Daniela Marta Roth, a graduate of University of Alberta, studied under the mentorship of Rena D’Souza, DDS, MS, PhD, Section on Molecules and Therapies for Craniofacial and Dental Disorders, NICHD, and Daniel Graf, PhD, Biomedical Oral and Maxillofacial Research Unit, University of Alberta.
» Thesis title: “Revealing Physiology of Craniofacial Growth Zones Through Pathology”

(continued on page 8)
March Announcements
(continued from page 7)

FARE 2025 TRAVEL AWARD COMPETITION
The NIH Fellows Award for Research Excellence (FARE) competition is NOW OPEN. FARE recognizes outstanding scientific research by NIH intramural postdoctoral fellows and graduate students. Abstracts will be evaluated anonymously, and the top 25% of applicants will receive a $1,500 travel award to present their exciting and novel research at a scientific meeting during FY2025 (October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025).

How to Apply:
Submit your abstract online via https://www2.training.nih.gov/transfer/fareapp until noon on March 14, 2024 (12:00 PM ET).

Who is eligible:
» Intramural postdoctoral fellows (e.g. IRTA, CRTA, Clinical, Research, and Visiting Fellows) with less than six years total postdoctoral experience in the NIH intramural research program as of March 14, 2024
» Postdoctoral-level Special Volunteers (e.g. NRC, NRSA, or Jane Coffin Childs fellowships etc.)
» Pre-doctoral IRTAs currently enrolled in a PhD program and conducting their doctoral dissertation research at an NIH lab
» Graduate students currently registered in the GPP (Graduate Partnerships Program) with the NIH

For more information, go to https://www2.training.nih.gov/felcom/fare. For questions and concerns, contact the FARE 2025 committee at FARE@mail.nih.gov.

SAVE THE DATE: POSTBAC POSTER DAYS, MAY 1–2, 2024
Registration opens this month!

Postbac Poster Days provides an opportunity for NIH postbacs to discuss their research projects and at the same time develop their communication and networking skills. For more information, please visit the Postbac Poster Day website for more information and to register.

NIH UNITE: ENDING STRUCTURAL RACISM (ESR) ACTIVITIES
The NIH UNITE initiative was established to identify and address structural racism within the NIH-supported and the greater scientific community.

The ESR Intranet includes various resources like the Toolkit, Newsletter, FAQs, and other information.

UNITE Milestones and Progress and the Co-Chairs Corner (public ESR webpages) are other avenues to stay informed on UNITE efforts.
March Events

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 1–2:30PM (VIRTUAL)
Overview of NIH Grant Writing
Led by Dennis Twombly, PhD, Deputy Director, NICHD Office of Extramural Policy

The NICHD Office of Education (OE), the Office of Extramural Policy, (OEP) and the Office of Health Equity (OHE) are collaborating to offer “Overview of NIH Grant Writing” led by Dennis Twombly, PhD, Deputy Director, NICHD Office of Extramural Policy, with invited extramural speakers.

The purpose of this workshop is to educate fellows about the extramural program, various funding mechanisms, and the application cycle (submission and review).

Specific topics include:
» Applying for Extramural Grants: Process Overview, Tips & Strategies
» The Role of the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) and the NICHD Scientific Review Branch (SRB)
» The Role of the Program Officer (PO)
» Opportunities for Intramural Fellows (e.g. K99)
» Opportunities for fellows once they secure positions in the extramural community

Registration required. Email Veronica Harker (veronica.harker@nih.gov) for the registration link. If you will be applying for the K99 in 2024, please provide your estimated submission date.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 1PM
Personal Statement Discussion and Feedback Session
Building 35, Room 620/630

Are you applying to medical school soon? Join Drs. Erin Walsh and Megan Bohn (Office of Education) for an opportunity to ask all your personal statement questions and receive feedback from us and your peers.

Email Veronica Harker (veronica.harker@nih.gov) for the registration link.

ONGOING EVENTS AROUND CAMPUS
NIH-Wide Office of Intramural Training and Education Events
For more information and registration, please visit Upcoming OITE Events.

NIH Library Training and Events
For more information and registration, please visit the NIH Library Calendar.